

THE INSULTING OF DRAUPADI

from the *Maha-Bharata*

by Prema-Rasa Dasi

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CAST: Narrator, Yudhishtira, Vidura, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Draupadi, Lord Krishna, Shakuni, Duryodhana, Dhritarashtra, Dushasana, Gandhari.

SCENE ONE

Yudhishtira Visits Vidura

Yudhishtira: Uncle Vidura, It's so nice to see you. But you don't look happy. Are you not feeling well? Is there something happening in Hastinapura? What is the cause of your unhappiness? Please tell me!

Vidura: My health is fine; what troubles me is the message that your Uncle Dhritarashtra has sent you.

Yudhishtira: What is the message, and what is it that worries you about it?

Vidura: He wants you and your brothers to go to the inauguration of the new gambling hall. He says you can spend a few days with him and enjoy a game of dice with his sons. He says you will find it quite pleasing.

Yudhishtira: I feel there is something hidden within this kind of invitation. I believe the main motivation for the invitation is the game of dice. That is clear. I don't like the game. It may turn out to be a cause of fighting between us and the sons of Dhritarashtra. Do you agree, Uncle?

Vidura: That's precisely the cause of my anxiety, I tried to convince my brother, but Dhritarashtra is deaf to my advice and insists on you playing.

Yudhishtira: Who will be in the game?

Vidura: Shakuni and Duryodhana.

Yudhishtira: Hmmm... Shakuni is a wizard with the dice. I'm not so good, but if it's an order from the king, what can I do? Everything that happens in this world has been ordained by the Creator. What can I do when my destiny has already been decided? I have no choice but to accept. The king knows my principles, and he knows I'll never disobey the orders of my elders. He's not interested in seeing us or in us seeing his new hall. What he wants is that I play this game of dice. Uncle Vidura, I hate to play. The game leads one to Hell.

Vidura: A *kshatriya* must never refuse a challenge. But I advise you to refuse this game.

Yudhishtira: Let fate have her way. I will tell my brothers, and we should depart for Hastinapura immediately.

SCENE TWO

The Gambling Hall

Narrator: Soon the Pandavas reached Hastinapura. They were welcomed very cordially by the Kauravas. Excellent arrangements were made for their stay. The day which was to become etched in their memories as the most terrible day in their lives finally dawned. That afternoon, representatives of both dynasties were present in the assembly.

Shakuni: Yudhishtira, why don't we sit down and play a game of dice?

Yudhishtira: I'd rather not play, since dice is the cause of so many unpleasant things. It destroys friendships. It is poison.

Shakuni: It is only a game to while away the time.

Yudhishtira: You call winning wealth by cheating to "while away time"? A wise man becomes a fool once he lays his hands on the dice. It robs him of his reasoning power. It is like wine; it destroys the good qualities of a man. Once the fever gets into him, nothing can cure him. This game is a thing to be avoided like some dreaded disease. Let us not play this game.

Shakuni: Poor Yudhishtira, he has just acquired wealth after the great Rajasuya sacrifice, and now he does not want to part with it. After all, it is new to him; let him keep it. Yudhishtira, you don't need to play if you are afraid to accept the challenge.

Yudhishtira: I'm not afraid, nor am I fond of wealth as you are. You know very well that I cannot refuse to play once I'm challenged. I will certainly play! Who is my opponent and what is the wager to be?

Duryodhana: I wager whatever precious stones and wealth you wager. My uncle Shakuni will play on my behalf.

Yudhishtira: That is not the rule. You must play and you must lay the wager.

Shakuni: It is evident that you want to avoid playing by giving some excuse or other. If you do not want to play, tell us frankly. **(there is silence in the room)**

Yudhishtira: I wager all my jewels and precious stones.

Duryodhana: Mine against yours. **(Shakuni shakes the dice and throws them on the floor)**

Shakuni: Won.

Yudhishtira: My chariots, gold, and horses.

Duryodhana: Mine against yours.

Shakuni: Won again!

Yudhishthira: My elephants, army, slaves.

Shakuni: Won!

Yudhishthira: I wager everything I possess, including my kingdom!

Duryodhana: All my wealth against yours.

Vidura: (to Dhritarashtra) My Lord, you've got to listen to my words, even if they're not pleasant to your ears. Once I told you that your son would be the cause of the destruction of the world. I asked you to kill him in order to save the world, but you would not listen to me. Now ☐ at least now believe me. The world will end if this game continues anymore. I beg you to stop it. **(silence)**

Duryodhana: (to Vidura) My dear uncle, ever since my childhood I've noticed one thing: you have always been partial to the Pandavas. You have never liked me. You say you are our well-wisher, but I do not think that is true. Leave us alone. Please do not speak words like this to my father. **(throw of the dice)**

Shakuni: I'm afraid you have lost everything. You have nothing left now. If you have something that you still can call yours, you can wager that. I will wager all that the prince has won so far. If you win, you can claim it all back.

Yudhishthira: I still have something to offer as my wager. This young handsome brother of mine, Nakula, will be my wager.

Shakuni: Won!

Yudhishthira: The wise Sahadeva is the next wager. There is no one like him in this world.

Shakuni: Won! You have two more brothers; evidently you do not think they are good enough to be used as wagers. Or perhaps you think that they are far superior to the sons of Madri. That is perhaps the reason for your hesitation.

Yudhishthira: You are trying to cause dissension among us. You can never do that. Here is Arjuna, who has no equal in the world. He is my wager.

Shakuni: Won!

Yudhishthira: Here is Bhima, who is the commander of my army. His strength is greater than that of all of you combined.

Shakuni: You've lost again!

Yudhishthira: I'm the wager now.

Shakuni: Once again you have lost!

Yudhishtira: I have lost everything! **(there is a moment of silence)**

Shakuni: You still have the jewel who can free you... your wife, Draupadi. **(Bhima gets up in anger, but Arjuna stops him)**

Yudhishtira: Draupadi, the favored queen of the Pandavas, is my wager now.

Shakuni: WON!!! **(everyone is silent. Vidura's face is lowered. Duryodhana embraces Shakuni)**

Duryodhana: This is the happiest day of my life! And I owe it entirely to you, my dear uncle, Shakuni. Draupadi is now our slave. You must go and bring her here into our presence. Let her be made to enter the apartments of our servants. She must get familiar with her new duties.

Vidura: Even now it is not too late. Do not go any farther. You are like a deer who unconsciously provokes the tiger. These Pandavas should be considered as terrible snakes which spit poison. Do not provoke them any longer. Draupadi is not your slave. She must not be insulted. Yudhishtira had no right to use her as the wager when he had lost himself. You do not like my words; you think I'm not your well-wisher. But I am. I'm warning you against the terrible wrath of the Pandavas. If you don't listen to my words, you will be destroyed.

Duryodhana: We have had enough and more of this lowborn man who can talk of nothing else! Dushasana, go to the women's apartments and tell that slave, Draupadi, that she belongs to us now, and that her lord and master, the Kuru prince, has asked her to appear in the court.

SCENE THREE

Draupadi's Apartments

Dushasana: Draupadi, you are wanted in the court by your new lord and master, Duryodhana.

Draupadi: What are you saying?

Dushasana: In the fever of the game, your husband Yudhishtira gambled you away. Now you belong to our Kuru prince □ you are Duryodhana's slave.

Draupadi: Did my husband have nothing else to lay as the wager? How can he gamble me away like this?

Dushasana: What I'm saying is true. First he lost everything of value, then his brothers one by one, then himself, and finally he lost you.

Draupadi: Go back to the court. Find out from Yudhishtira whether he gambled himself away first or me. Come back with the answer.

Dushasana: Come, slave! Come to Duryodhana. Do not look so modest. It is but

right that you should turn your lotus eyes to the Kuru monarch. You can ask this subtle question to the eldest of the court. As for our king, he has commanded me to bring you to the court. I will drag you there if you refuse. **(Dushasana drags Draupadi)**

SCENE FOUR

Draupadi In The Court

Draupadi: In this great assembly I see great personalities, the elders of this ancient house of the Kurus, known from time immemorial for the *dharma* residing in them. You are all present; and yet unrighteousness has reared its ugly head. Can it be possible? Here is a man drunk with power, asking his cruel brother to drag a woman to the court. And you are all just looking on – even my husband, who is the very image of *dharma*! Righteousness has indeed fled from this court where this atrocity is allowed. I asked for a detail of the game. I wanted to know if he lost me first or himself. I was not given a reply. And this man has the audacity to drag me into the court! When people like Bhishma and Drona are allowing this, there is no such thing as *dharma* in this court. I will ask you all once again – do you all consider me a slave of this man, or am I free? **(she addresses Bhishma)** You are the home of all wisdom and learning. They say there is none wiser than you. Grandfather, can you tell me if I am a slave?

Bhishma: I am indeed at a loss to give a proper answer to your question. The subtle shades of *dharma* are very hard to understand. A man cannot gamble something once he has lost himself and when he has declared that he has been won by another. According to that, Yudhishtira had no right to lose you. But then there is this to be considered: A man has a right over his wife whether he is free or not. Accordingly, I cannot surely say that you are free. Yudhishtira knew that Shakuni is a wizard in the art of dice, yet he played with him willingly enough. Though he was being defeated, Yudhishtira continued to play, and he finally used you as the wager. I am unable to answer your question.

Draupadi: You give the impression that my husband played the game willingly. Your dear grandson Duryodhana and his uncle challenged him to play. Yudhishtira didn't want to play. He told uncle Vidura this in Indraprastha. He was forced to play this deceitful game. Knowing that he is not a skilled player, Shakuni made him play with him, Shakuni who is a wizard in the art of throwing the dice. My husband had no chance of winning, and you all knew it. Yet you were all looking on. Did you not see the injustice? Did you not know that it was an unfair game? You should have stopped it. Not one of you did anything to stop it, nor did you blame this sinful Duryodhana for what he was doing.

Now you tell me that my husband played the game voluntarily, that he voluntarily used me as the wager! When he lost himself and then announced me as the next wager, why didn't you interfere and say that it was not right? Please listen to my words. I ask a question to this assembly. There is no assembly where there are no elders; they are not elders who do not speak what is righteous. Where there is no truth, there is no righteousness! **(Dushasana laughs)**

Dushasana: You are now the slave of Duryodhana. Why do you worry about the subtleties of *dharma*? You are a slave; your *dharma* is to please your master, your new master – the great Kaurava monarch, Duryodhana.

Bhima: (speaks with anger to Yudhishtira) Look at the result of your madness!

All the wealth that was ours is gone. You gambled away everything that we had. I did not speak a word. I did not mind it even when you gambled us all away. Even that I bore with patience because you are my *guru*, my elder, and we are all yours forever. But my lord, look at our dear wife Draupadi, dragged into this hall of sin by that animal! Do you think I can bear this? I cannot bear this any longer. Sahadeva, bring me fire! I must burn these hands of my brother.

Arjuna: Bhima, what is this action of yours? What has come over you? You have never been so rude to our brother before! You have always treated him with the respect due a father.

Bhima: True, I did respect him once. He was different then, but now his arm deserves to be burnt. I will throw him and his burnt arms away from here. Look on this scene □ doesn't your blood boil? Can you stand this?

Arjuna: Of course I'm angry, too. But can you not see that our brother is just as angry? He's burning with an anger against himself! He would burn his arms himself if he could. Do not add to his unhappiness. The Kauravas have always wanted to see us quarrel. Until now we have always been united. If you rebel against our dear brother, then their wish will be fulfilled.

Vidura: You are right, Draupadi. There is no righteousness in this hall. We all deserve to be sent to Hell for this gross crime! No one in this hall questioned the act of Yudhishtira when he offered you as the wager. Even now, why are they all silent? Is there not one here who has the courage to defy Duryodhana and speak the truth? **(pause)** Well, then, hear what I have to say □ Draupadi has not been lost. Since she is the wife of all of the Pandavas, she was not Yudhishtira's sole property to use as a wager. Therefore, she is free!

Duryodhana: You are assuming too much wisdom. All the wise ones here, beginning from Bhishma, Drona, and Dhritarashtra, are convinced that Draupadi is a slave. If she's not a slave, and the husbands think that she's not a slave, do you think they would have allowed her to be brought into the court? You say that it is not right to call her a slave, but there is no need to consider *dharma* in the case of the Pandavas. Where have you seen one woman being shared by five men? She's a slave, just like her lords. They have no right to even wear the clothes they're wearing. Dushasana, remove the garments of these five men, and also those of Draupadi, and surrender them to their lawful owner, the prince. **(after collecting the garments of the five Pandavas, Dushasana takes hold of the upper clothes of Draupadi)**

Draupadi: I have heard that when a great danger threatens us, nothing can help us except complete surrender to the Supreme Lord. My dear Lord Krishna, Vasudeva, they say You are the last refuge of the helpless. You are everything to me. They say You're everywhere, and that You're present wherever Your devotee sings Your glories. You must, therefore, be here. I surrender myself to You. It is up to You to save me! **(Dushasana pulls her clothing, Krishna appears and supplies unlimited clothing)**

Bhima: Listen to me, all of you *kshatriyas*! If I do not kill this sinner, Dushasana, and drink his blood, let me never see the heavens where my forefathers are! I will

tear his heart out and drink his blood.

Duryodhana: Why are you silent, Dushasana? Take her to the servants' quarters. Let her get acquainted with her new duties.

Draupadi: I am not a slave! Dronacharya, Bhishma, am I a slave?

Duryodhana: Stop repeating your question! Stop saying you're not a slave! We've heard it enough. Your husbands have so far made no attempt to answer your question. They stood silent even when your honor was at stake. I am waiting for Yudhishtira to speak. Let him say whether you belong to him or to me. We will decide your future after that. **(Yudhishtira's head is bowed, and he remains silent)**

Duryodhana: Draupadi, look! Your lords are silent. I will answer your question – you are free; free to choose a man from amongst us. You are not born to be a slave. You are meant to be the wife of a ruling monarch.

Bhima: I would have killed all of you long ago, had it not been for the fact that I respect my brother. When he announced that we were slaves of this man, we accepted his words. Look at my arms! They are aching to crush into pulp the wicked sons of Dhritarashtra! But for Yudhishtira, this would already have taken place.

Duryodhana: Yudhishtira, what do you say? Is she free or a slave? Answer if you dare. **(he then exposes his thigh to Draupadi)**

Bhima: (springs to his feet like a cobra) If I do not break that thigh, then I do not deserve to attain heaven! I will break that thigh with my club!

Duryodhana: Dushasana, why do you wait? Take this woman to the slave quarters!

Bhima: I am going to kill Duryodhana. My brother Arjuna will kill Radheya! Sahadeva will kill this evil Shakuni! And I will also tear out the heart of Dushasana!

Arjuna: Bhima, your words are prophetic! Let the world know that these fools amongst men have irrevocably ordered their own deaths!

Sahadeva: Shakuni, your dear dice are like sharp arrows that spell your death. I swear that I will kill you!

Nakula: My brothers have sworn to kill Duryodhana, Dushasana, Radheya, and Shakuni. I promise you that I will kill the son of Shakuni, Uluka. They will all die at the hands of the Pandavas.

Dhritarashtra: Duryodhana, in your foolishness, you have insulted the pure-hearted Draupadi. Your death is now certain. Draupadi, I will grant you any boon you want. Please forgive the behavior of my son, who did not know what he was doing!

Draupadi: This is the boon I request, then: May Yudhishtira be released from bondage. Please announce that he is not the slave of this sinner, Duryodhana.

Dhritarashtra: Consider it done! Ask for another boon.

Draupadi: Please release his four brothers.

Dhritarashtra: That, too, is done. Ask me for another boon, my daughter.

Draupadi: You have already granted two boons. To ask for a third would be to transgress *dharma*. **(Duryodhana and friends leave the hall in a huff)**

Yudhishtira: My dear uncle, Dhritarashtra. You have always commanded us, and we have always obeyed. If you will tell us what to do, we will now do so.

Dhritarashtra: Yudhishtira, I am touched by your humility! You are wise as you are good and noble! Please forget all that has transpired here today. I want you to take back all that you lost in the game today. Go back to Khandava-prastha, and continue your rule. Please consider that today was only a bad dream. Please think kindly of my son, Duryodhana.

SCENE FIVE

Dushasana: Duryodhana, your father has returned everything to the Pandavas!

Duryodhana: What? How could he? **(he runs to Dhritarashtra)** Father, how could you do such a thing? The Pandavas are like deadly cobras that have been stepped on. Do you think they will forget these insults? Do you think King Draupada will remain silent when he hears of the insults to his dear daughter, Draupadi? None of them will rest until we are all dead! This madness of yours must be rectified.

Dhritarashtra: But Duryodhana, what happened in that hall was so irreligious...

Duryodhana: Just listen to me, father. I have the answer! We will challenge the Pandavas to a final game of dice. The winner will rule the entire kingdom. The loser will have to live in exile for 13 years. The 13th year must be spent in disguise. If anyone discovers their disguise during that year, they must spend another 12 years in the forest. During that time, I will become so powerful and secure in my position that they will have no chance to take their power back when they return.

Gandhari: (to Duryodhana) My son, I wish we had taken the advice of Vidura and destroyed you as soon as you were born. You are the root cause of this terrible injustice. Even now it is not too late. Listen to me. If you repent and desist from further sin, the Pandavas may even forget their oaths and spare your life. Do not try to convince your father. He is so easily led.

Dhritarashtra: I cannot refuse my son anything!

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Narrator: Eventually there was a great war between the Kurus and the Pandavas and their followers. As the *Maha-Bharata* tells us, by the grace of Lord

Krishna the mighty Bhima broke Duryodhana's thigh and killed him. Arjuna shot an arrow and cut Karna's head off. Such is the end result of lust, anger and greed. This concludes our drama today □ a small portion of the Vedic literature, the *Maha-Bharata*. (***kirtan***)

The End